

APPENDIX IV

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Section: LOCAL NEWS

Group: Dover schools could face lawsuit

Says it's a textbook case of church, state separation

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Article Text:

The quest of several Dover Area School Board members to find a high school biology textbook that teaches both evolution and creationism could put the district at odds with the U.S. Supreme Court and at risk of a lawsuit.

William Buckingham, a board member and head of the curriculum committee, said this week he was disturbed by a proposed high school biology textbook, the 2002 edition of Prentice Hall Biology, because it was laced with Darwinism.

Board member Noel Wenrich agreed.

The book was initially selected by the high school science department and district administration to replace the current textbook, which is six years old and out of date in some areas.

A recommendation on the book will come from the curriculum committee, which also includes board members Sheila Harkins and Casey Brown. Buckingham said the committee would look for a book that presented both creationism and evolution.

However, teaching creationism may get the district in trouble.

Robert Boston, spokesman for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the district will be inviting a lawsuit if it chooses a textbook that teaches creationism.

"Creationism isn't a science, it's religion, and any attempts to introduce creationism into public school science classes would most likely spark a lawsuit," Boston said. "The district would almost certainly lose a lawsuit like that. It's not even worth wasting the time and energy to consider."

The Washington, D.C.-based group is leading the charge in Hanover to remove a monument to the Ten Commandments from the borough-owned Wirt Park.

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Americans United sent a letter to the borough council in November, saying the monument violates the First Amendment and asking that it be removed from public land, where it has been since the 1950s.

The letter sparked strong public response, as residents signed petitions and held a vigil asking the borough not to move the monument.

At the suggestion of State Rep. Steve Nickol, the council petitioned the York County Common Pleas Court for permission to sell the monument and the land on which it sits to a nonprofit organization, so that it will no longer be on public property. Judge Gregory Snyder will hear Hanover's arguments at 9 a.m. Monday.

Previous cases: In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the teaching of creationism in public school as a violation of the separation of church and state.

But Buckingham said he is unconcerned about violating the separation of church and state.

Although he swore to uphold the Constitution when he became a school board member, Buckingham said he didn't come to uphold the separation of church and state, which he sees as a myth and the Supreme Court's interpretation.

Also, the Pennsylvania Department of Education high school science standards require the teaching of evolution.

Assistant Superintendent Michael Baksa said the current textbook, called Biology: The Living Science, and the school's science curriculum teach evolution.

"We do not address the origins of life," he said. "The origin of life is left to the personal beliefs of each family."

However, he said teachers may make reference to creationism in class and the district would not prevent students from pursuing other theories.

The district has not rejected the proposed new textbook, Baksa said, but it will continue to look for a book that will make everyone happy.

However, he acknowledged that at the end of the day, the book has to match state standards, which would mean a book that teaches evolution.

The other curriculum committee members stayed away from the creationism issue.

Brown declined to comment, saying she will be making a public statement on the issue at the next board meeting, at 7 p.m. Monday at North Salem Elementary.

Harkins said she didn't think the high school needed a new science textbook, saying the current one has hardly been used. She would not comment on creationism.

The school board will have the final say on which textbook to use, said Superintendent Richard Nilsen. [Subscribe Now!](#)

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